



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20460

MAR 17 2008

ASSISTANT ADMINISTRATOR
FOR ENFORCEMENT AND
COMPLIANCE ASSURANCE

U.S. Forest Service
Planning Rule Comments
P.O. Box 162969
Sacramento, CA 95816-2969

Dear Sir/Madam:

In accordance with our responsibilities under Section 309 of the Clean Air Act (CAA) and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has reviewed the Forest Service's Revised Planning Rule, 36 CFR part 219, and the Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for National Forest System Land Management Planning (CEQ # 20080055).

The final EIS considered seven alternatives to provide the necessary guidance to develop, revise, and amend land management plans for the National Forest System; Alternative M is identified as the preferred alternative. Alternative M (a modified version of the former Alternative A) is a modified version of the 2005 rule, and includes requirements for Environmental Management Systems (EMS). Further, it places limitations on timber removal in the Agency directives. Lastly, the rule codifies, "absent extraordinary circumstances, land management plans developed, amended, or revised under the proposed rule are strategic and are one stage in an adaptive cycle of planning for management of National Forest System lands."

For the most part, the final EIS provided adequate responses to EPA's concerns about annual monitoring, which is an integral component of an effective EMS. We also agree that the specific requirements of each land management unit are unique, which militates against including significant detail in the rule on specific monitoring goals and objectives. Further, we acknowledge that rule requires that plan monitoring programs take into account financial capabilities, but the final EIS states that the funds available for monitoring will be determined through the Congressional appropriation process. Although we agree that this is an appropriate approach, we are concerned that sufficient funds may not be made available in all cases to conduct the necessary monitoring. Given monitoring is a critical component of the Forest Service's new planning paradigm, which relies heavily on EMS and adaptive management, we recommend that the record of decision include further discussion about how the financial needs for monitoring will be met.



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EPA appreciates the opportunity to comment on the final EIS and rule at 36 CFR part 219 for National Forest System Land Management Planning. Should you have questions about our comments, I can be reached at 202/ 564-5400 or your staff can contact Elaine Suriano at 202/564-7162.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Susan E. Bromm". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending from the end of the name.

Susan E. Bromm
Acting Director
Office of Federal Activities